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ABSTRACT

The study reported in this paper was undertaken to determine the number of blacks who graduated from a selected group of nine eastern universities between 1895 and 1945. Conditions and black student experiences during this period are considered and compared with the present. A short review of history prior to 1895 is provided to put into perspective the economic, political, social, and educational factors which prevented many blacks from attending college during this period. The experiences of several blacks who were able to attend colleges, and their accomplishments, are briefly described. Implications of this study for current and future university policy are discussed. Recommendations are made for the removal of legal and economic barriers, increase in financial aid to black student applicants, remedial help for black students who come from high schools that do not adequately prepare them for college level work, and the elimination of token integration. (Author/EB)

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COLLEGES AND BLACK STUDENTS

Barbara Lewinson, Ph.D.

It has been stated that adverse social and economic pressures as well as segregationalist policies completely prohibited Blacks from graduating from Eastern schools. In considering this, a study was undertaken to determine the number, if any, of Blacks who graduated from a selected group of nine eastern universities during the period 1895 to 1945. In addition, conditions and student experiences during this early period were considered and compared with the present.

The time frame 1895-1945 was used because prior to 1865, most Blacks in the United States were slaves, and from 1865-1895, they were primarily concerned with the basic issue of survival. The study concluded with the year 1945 since enough time has elapsed since then to allow the individuals studied to develop professionally in the interim between graduation and the present.

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Historical Background

The background against which the people in this study went to school is a bleak one. The period of reconstruction was over and the plight of the black man was worsening. Politically, although Blacks were for a period of time members of Congress, sheriffs, etc., they were at no time considered to be in power. The fact that Blacks had been provided with the opportunity to vote was soon meaningless. The North did not uphold the rights of the freed man and left the South more and more to its own devices. Because of economic dependency upon Whites and economic insecurity, Blacks were soon intimidated by the Whites and lost what political power they might have had. They had no alternative in

many cases but to eventually submit again to their former masters. This led quickly to a restoration of White Southern control in the South, which had been for a short period taken over by White Northerners. Sweeping disenfranchisement took place through laws providing for literacy tests, poll tax, etc. Rampant racism became the order of the day, and where Blacks would not submit, they were intimidated in every way, including death. In addition, the deteriorating political and economic position of the Blacks precluded development of social position.

Social status was virtually non-existent. "In the early years of the twentieth century, the Roots of Recovery confronted deeply entrenched customs, prejudices and a hostile economic system fortied by federal, state, and local sanctions."[1]

In addition to substandard social and political levels, the black economic system was not stable, and as a result, the majority of Blacks were not able economically to consider education. However, even if the Blacks were able to consider it, the white community did not encourage black intellectual development at the university level.

Intellectual status along with other status indicators was also below par. A university level liberal arts education for the Black was considered by most to be unnecessary. And though Northern philanthropists contributed "to the education of Negroes in ever increasing amounts," and while the controversy raged over the most practicable and effective type of education for Negroes, the vast majority of Negroes were facing the difficult task of making a living and were becoming more and more convinced that they would have to work out their own salvation in terms of the means at their immediate disposal."[2]

The majority of Whites felt that Blacks only needed a certain level of education to be productive within their sphere. Even the elementary

level of education in the South, where provided, was often substandard and only for a few months a year, usually the four months between farm seasons.[3] In the North the situation, depending on the area, was not always better. Many of the Whites were in favor of the type of education espoused by Booker T. Washington which would perpetuate an agriculturally and industrially oriented black race rather than a liberally educated one.

Given the poor economic, political, social and educational situation prevailing in 1895, very few Blacks could or dared to try to go to a college, black or white. In 1826, John Russworm graduated from Bowdoin and in so doing was the first Black to graduate from a recognized college. Herman Dreer, graduate of 1910, was the second Black to attend Bowdoin College. For the twenty years following Russworm's graduation there were only seven more black graduates of "recognized colleges" and according to Horace Mann Bond's book, The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order, only twenty-eight Blacks graduated from recognized universities up to 1860. Thus, at the beginning of the period (1895-1940) a college education for Blacks was still the exception. During the entire period 1826 to 1936, there were approximately 6,500 black graduates from Northern Colleges.[4] For the period up to 1933 there were only a total of eighty-five doctorates awarded among the whole American Black population. Therefore, the three hundred fifty-one graduates ascertained in the study occupy a distinct place in the history of black development.

This then is the framework against which these graduates were considered.

Research Data

The schools studied were Amherst, Bates, Bowdoin, Brown, Colby, Dartmouth, Oberlin, Princeton, and Rutgers. The initial step in the research was to ascertain the number of Black graduates, if any, from the nine schools chosen. This was done through a thorough check of all the graduates from these schools. Data were gathered from yearbooks, registrar and alumni records as well as personal files. The numbers of graduates are stated in Table I following:

Table I

Schools	Black Graduates
Amherst	35
Bates	6
Bowdoin	12
Brown	25
Colby	2
Dartmouth	35
Oberlin	212
Princeton	2
Rutgers	12

The small number 351 is small of and within itself, but even smaller when considered against the total number of graduates. This fact is established in Table II showing the total number of graduates from each of the schools as compared to the black graduates. The small number is evident even at Oberlin with the largest number of black students. In addition, Oberlin had a specific policy of non-segregation.

Table II

Schools	Total Graduates	Black Graduates
Amherst	4,999	35
Bates	1,000	6
Bowdoin	3,825	12
Brown	4,381 (undergraduates)	25
Colby	3,584	2
Dartmouth	13,667	35
Oberlin	10,380	212
Princeton	19,045	2
Rutgers	6,025	12

The numbers also represent the implicit acceptance by white society of the Plessy vs. Ferguson decision of separate but equal educational facilities being acceptable. Black students were prevented from going to the vast majority of white institutions of higher learning. Those few schools that did not overtly discriminate were not interested enough in black students to provide financial assistance. The schools, therefore, effectively barred Blacks from attending.

Accounts of black students arriving at black colleges as well as those few at white colleges show the economic position of most Blacks. Benjamin Mays arrived at Bates penniless. J. Saunders Redding speaks of one of the black students, a straight A student, dying from starvation which led to tuberculosis. Henry Proctor went to Fisk with $25.00 in 1884; Thomas Burton arrived at Berea in 1881 with $9.00 in his pockets; Booker Washington had 50 cents when he reached Hampton, and M. L. Latta arrived at Shaw University with 10 cents and lived on saltine crackers and cheese for one semester.[5] The picture was grim.

Discussion of the Graduates

In a study of the data, the first point of interest is that a very high percentage of these students went on to graduate or professional school. Obviously, without a college degree, obtainment of an advanced degree would have been impossible. Using three of the schools as an example, one sees the following:

Table III

School	Number of Black Graduates	Advanced Degrees
Amherst	35	23
Bates	6	4
Brown	20	7

Another major point is the accomplishments of some of the graduates. Among the graduates were Judge William Henry Hastie, who became a Federal Judge in the District Court of the Virgin Islands; assistant solicitor of the U.S.D.I.; Civilian Aid to the Secretary of War, and the first Black Governor of the Virgin Islands. In addition he became the first Black United States Circuit Judge, (Third Circuit Court of Appeals), a position held for twenty-three years. It was said of Frederick Parker, recipient of the Harvard Teaching Award, "I think Mr. Parker by being professional at all times, and setting the kind of example that many of us have never had the privilege of seeing, was very instrumental in helping men understand the role of the male. Of course, having the opportunity of living in the same town, I was welcome in the home and here again I had a chance to observe him as a head of the house, a father, a counselor, a community worker, and one who is always interested in others and willing to share." [6] Dr. Benjamin Mays,

currently the first black president of the Atlanta School Board, has been a first in many of his activities. He was among the first Blacks to graduate from Bates and the University of Chicago. He then became Dean of Howard University's School of Religion and later served as President of Morehouse College for twenty-seven years; Dr. Horatio Hill, graduate of Oberlin, B.D. in 1921 and M.A. at Yale in 1923, became the first full-time director of a Negro church in America. Following this, he initiated a program out of which came the Baptist Educational Center. The center with Dr. Hill at the head was the pioneer in New York of religious education.

> "Dr. Hill was a motivator, and I know personally any number of people who would definitely say that without his spirit and wisdom in saying the right word to them they would never be where they are, and this would go for an almost unlimited number of folks who are in leadership roles today....
>
> "I salute him proudly, and identify with your thesis that he was one of the early leaders who saw clearly what education meant to the black community, and became a continuing prod for many people to continue their efforts in educational areas."[7]

Charles Drew developed blood plasma; Owen Dodd has become a well known author and playwright; and J. Saunders Redding has received among other awards two Guggenheim Fellowships and the Mayflower award for distinguished writing. These individuals represent but a few of the outstanding individuals among the graduates.

Thus, this group of graduates while so very small proceeded after graduation to provide a nucleus, i.e., Donald Gaines Murray, graduate of Amherst, became the first Black to enter the School of Law of the University of Maryland after a court battle to gain admittance. In the court case, "Murray's counsel was led by Charles Hamilton Houston,[8] the first Negro editor of the Harvard Law Review. Houston was assisted by Thurgood Marshall,[9] a graduate of Lincoln University (Pennsylvania) and

Howard University. The victory in the Murray case became a precedent and several months after its close, a similar suit was filed by the attorneys of Lloyd Lionel Gaines, a graduate of Vashon High School in St. Louis and Lincoln University (Missouri)."[10] This nucleus of individuals, in whatever field they chose to enter, provided an example to the White and Black world of what Blacks could do when given the opportunity. The tragedy is that for every one of these individuals there are thousands who were actively denied the opportunity to acquire a college education and thereby prohibited from making the kind of contributions these individuals have made.

And, given the numbers it would appear that the importance or influence of such a small group could not be very great. However, they were among the only members of their race to be in this position and their accomplishments, lives, and positions assume greater proportions than would ordinarily be the case. In a forthcoming article the influence that these graduates have had upon black youth will be explored in depth.

Implications for the Future

The implications of this study are many for current and future university policy. First, it is essential that all barriers be removed not only legally, but economically. To state that students are to be admitted regardless of race, creed, or color is only the beginning step. Unless students who are not financially well off are given financial aid, the removal of legal barriers is just as effective in keeping out the economically disadvantaged black student. Second, those black students coming from high schools that do not adequately prepare them for college level work need remedial help. To let these students into a

school and not assist them academically almost ensures their failure. Third, the numbers of black students must be made to approximate their numbers in society. Token integration is not enough. Fourth, the student of today should no longer have to feel the kind of despair that is seen in the statement that follows by a student at Brown in 1920's. Dr. J. Saunders Redding states in his book, No Day of Triumph, for some students no matter how accepted they were academically the situation of being the only one or perhaps one of three or four in a school became too much for them. Said one to J. Saunders Redding in his room at Brown:

> 'There must be some place better than this. God damn it, there must be! I can find a place somewhere. This isn't the place for me. I feel like everybody's staring at me, all these white guys, waiting for me to make a bad break. Things I'd do without thinking about them, I do now like they were the most important things in the whole damned world. How the hell do you stand it? We're always talking about being casual. All right. But what do we do?' He got up nervously, but sat down again almost at once. 'I'll tell you good and damn well what we do! We put on the damndest airs in the world. We're showing off. Casually, casually, but Christ! And yet everything comes so hard, you can hear us breathing way over on George Street. I'm sick of being casual! I want to be honest and sincere about something. I want to stop feeling like I'll fall apart if I unclench my teeth. Oh, Christ.'[11]

When Redding tried to answer this boy, he found he couldn't. "It was just as well, for I do not know what I would have said. There is no answer to truth. I do not know what I thought or felt other than the need to retreat from the truth against which all my defenses had toppled."[12]

That night the boy, Clyde Bastron, "left on the night boat. I never saw him again, for in the late spring he killed himself in the bathroom of his parents' home in Cleveland. He was the first of five suicides in a half-dozen years from that group I knew in New England. Two of them were girls. By any reckoning, this is a high percentage. Excluding that numerous crowd of four-flushers who took an evening course here and there in the various colleges in Boston, there were not more than fifteen

of us who knew each other intimately as fellow collegians."[13] And yet as seen in this next statement the role of the Black student is still all too often unnecessarily difficult.

> Token integration is not sufficient. The pressure from being one of a very few blacks at a school can so influence the student's feelings and perceptions that he is never able to achieve the academic level of which he is capable. Integration must be total, not token, for the black students to feel like everyone else- first a human being, then a student and only incidentally black. And the most tragic commentary of our times is that an almost identical statement to the one made by Claude Bastrop was made in December of 1973 by a student of Douglass College of Rutgers University. Mary Ann Peterson, a freshman, says 'for a freshman to come into a situation like this, I can't stand to be around them (white people) any more. If I have to associate with them in any situation outside of the dorm, it bugs me. Before it never bothered me, but now I just can't take it'.[14]

In conclusion, the data indicates that a small number of black students did graduate from Northern "White" Universities. Thus, the hypothesis that no Blacks graduated must be rejected and even though the sample is small it can be considered to be representative of other Universities during that period. Furthermore, many of the adverse conditions present in the years 1895-1945 can still be found today. This supports the hypothesis that experiences of students of the past can be guides for proposed action in the present and future.

Yes, a small number of Blacks did graduate from these schools. But the data show the numbers to be ludicrously small. The graduates in this study show that given the opportunity the black student is capable of achieving the highest levels of academic and professional development. Removal of barriers is not enough, if we are to alleviate the effects of past discrimination which has resulted in the following statistics. These statistics show that a Negro male who completes four years of college can expect a median annual income of merely $110 more than a white male

who has only a high school diploma.[15] In addition although Negroes represent 11.5% of the population,[16] they are only 1.2% of the lawyers, and judges, 2% of the physicians, 2.3% of the dentists, 1.1% of the engineers and 2.6% of the college and university professors.[17]

There must be active effort to ensure that black students achieve to their fullest, if they are to play the constructive role in society of which they are capable. Trained minds are needed to ensure future development. To allow a whole segment of society to fail is morally, and ethically wrong. Neither universities nor society as a whole has yet to provide "real" equality or educational opportunity from grade school through college for the Black student. The time is now.

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2. John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, (New York: Vintage Books, 1969, p. 397.

3. Virgil A. Clift, Archibald W. Anderson, H. Gordon Hullfish, Negro Education in America. (New York: Harper & Bros., 1962), p. 43.

4. Horace Mann Bond, The Education of the Negro in American Social Order, (New York: Octagon Books, 1966).

5. John W. Blassingame, (Sausalito, Calif.: Black Scholar Foundation, Dec. 1973-Jan. 1974), Vol. 5, #4, p.270.

6. Samuel H. Johnson, National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students, Atlanta, Georgia, April 23, 1971.

7. Edler G. Hawkins, personal letter, May 4, 1971.

8. Houston devoted a great deal of his professional life to the attainment of the Black's equality within the ideal of the American democratic heritage. He lived to see some of the fruits of his victory, but warned Negroes not to "shout too soon" in an issue of the Crisis, a publication initiated by DuBois.

9. Thurgood Marshall is a former student of Justice Hastie, one of the graduates of Amherst.

10. Virgil A. Clift, Archibald W. Anderson, H. Gordon Hullfish, Negro Education in America. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962).

11. J. Saunders Redding, No Day of Triumph, (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 37.

12. Ibid., p. 37 & 38.

13. Ibid., p. 39.

14. Barbara Lewinson, Crisis, "Black Students in Eastern Universities," (New York: Crisis, 1974).

15. U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-60, No. 105, at 198 (1977) (table 47).

16. U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States 25 (table 24).

17. Id., at 407-408 (table 662) (based on 1970 census).